

NEWS

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Bergen County Man Sentenced to Five Years for Theft of Goya Painting

(More)

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NEWARK – A Bergen County man was sentenced today to five years in prison for conspiring to steal the Francisco de Goya painting “Children with a Cart,” U.S. Attorney Christopher J. Christie announced.

U.S. District Judge Dennis M. Cavanaugh also ordered Steven Lee Olson, 49, of Carlstadt, formerly of Roxbury, to serve three years of supervised release upon completion of his prison term.

Olson pleaded guilty on Dec. 20 before Judge Cavanaugh to conspiring to steal the Spanish master’s 1778 masterpiece as it was in transit to the Guggenheim Museum in New York City from the Toledo Museum of Art in Toledo, Ohio. The Toledo museum owned the painting, and at the time of its theft had insured it for more than \$1 million. Olson was indicted on Oct. 22 and charged with the theft. He’s been in custody since his arrest on Oct. 23.

Separately today, Judge Cavanaugh sentenced Olson’s co-conspirator, Roman Szurko, 27, of Roxbury Township, to one year in prison for his guilty plea to the same conspiracy charge. Neither defendant was fined. Szurko must surrender to the federal Bureau of Prisons by Aug. 28 to begin serving his sentence.

In a letter to the Court, representatives of the Toledo Museum of Art wrote that the stolen painting was insured for \$1.1 million and noted that the painting’s “intrinsic value to [the museum’s] collection, as well as to the whole of art history, is immeasurable.” The painting’s “permanent loss would have been devastating to both the Museum and the public, in whose trust we hold our collection.”

At his plea hearing, Olson admitted arriving at Szurko’s home on Nov. 8, 2006. Olson, who at the time also lived in Roxbury, and Szurko traveled west on Route 80 to the parking lot of a Howard Johnson’s in Bartonsville, Pa.

Olson admitted breaking into a white, climate-controlled moving truck and taking the painting and bags of tools from the truck. Olson and Szurko then went back to Olson’s residence and hid the painting there. After the Toledo Museum of Art offered a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the recovery of the painting, the two men turned in the painting, claiming they had discovered it in a basement wall in Olson’s residence. Both men admitted that they were attempting to collect the reward for the painting they had stolen.

In determining the actual sentences, Judge Cavanaugh consulted the Advisory U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which provide appropriate sentencing ranges that take into account the severity and characteristics of the offenses, the defendants’ criminal histories, if any, and other factors. The judge, however, was not bound by those guidelines in

determining sentences. Parole has been abolished in the federal system. Defendants who are given custodian terms must serve nearly all that time.

Christie credited Special Agents of the FBI, under the direction of Special Agent in Charge Weysan Dun in Newark, with the investigation of Olson and Szurko.

The government was represented by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Seth Kosto and Melissa Jampol of the Criminal Division in Newark.

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Defense counsel:

Joseph Ferrante, Esq., Newark (for Olson)

John Williams, Esq., Hamburg (for Szurko)